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WOMEN IN JAPAN'S WORK WORLD SEE SLOW CHANGE FROM LABOR SHORTAGE, EQUAL EMPLOYMENT LAW

Summary

Conditions would appear ripe in Japan for women to feel just a bit smug about their importance to the economy. Calls for hiring more women have sounded forth from government offices as one way of helping Japan survive what demographers project as a long-term labor shortage. Moreover, women's cooperation definitely is needed if the fertility rate is going to stop shrinking and return to a level capable of population replacement. The government has taken steps to encourage the hiring of more women as well as the birth of more babies, a seemingly contradictory action in a country where a majority of young mothers remain outside the labor force.

Yet, despite a significant number of working women in Japan, workplace and societal conditions are such that female employment remains one of the cushions by which businesses survive the economy's ups and downs. Even with legal guarantees of equality, constraints remain on employment opportunities for women, often in the name of protection. Women's support groups generally place more importance on health and safety issues than on strict equality in employment, at least as understood from an American perspective. And, although the government preaches equality for women, its own hiring and promotion practices fall short, as does its advocacy of private-sector compliance with equal employment opportunity laws.

As Japan works to upgrade its citizens' standard of living and lessen international criticism about the workaholic Japanese employee, structural changes could begin to benefit the working woman. Among current roadblocks to equal participation are the

seniority system, the use of extensive overtime and a reliance on part-time or temporary workers whose jobs often are the first to go in times of economic downturn. Economic necessity might produce some adjustments in these management practices, but fundamental change will not occur without changes in both men's and women's attitudes toward work, leisure and child care. Such changes may go beyond what the Japanese as a people consider prudent or necessary. These are matters of concern not only for Japan; the spread of Japanese-owned businesses overseas indicates that Japanese employment practices have the potential to influence personnel decisions in other countries.

More Women Working

Women's participation in Japan's labor market has grown from 45.7 percent in 1975 to 50.1 percent last year, meaning that almost half of all women over the age of 15 were looking for a job or doing some form of work that allowed them to be counted as employed. Among the reasons for this increase is what many Japanese analysts call a different life cycle, one in which women marry later and return to work sooner after having children. Others point to more job opportunities as well as a heightened awareness of the work world because more women are graduating from high school and entering a two- or a four-year college. Some observers also point to economic rationales.

The analysts who attribute the growing number of women in the work force to the life-cycle theory note that today's woman is marrying at 25 or 26, whereas her counterpart from about 40 years ago married at age 23 or so. This allows more time to work between school and marriage or the birth of the first child, which usually occurs about a year after marriage. If a woman has a second child, typically this will be by age 29. The shrinking fertility rate, 1.53 in 1990, means that fewer Japanese women are having two children. Thus, by the time a woman is in her late 30s or early 40s she may be working outside the home while her child(ren) is (are) in school.

This theory rests heavily on the notion that Japanese women traditionally drop out of the labor force to have children and stay at home with them until they are in school. But even this traditional view has changed somewhat. Until fairly recently mothers were expected to be available at home for their children throughout their educational life. Now an estimated 35.8 percent of mothers whose youngest child is 6 years old or less are in the work force, while up to 65 percent of mothers with a youngest child aged 7 to 14 is working; the employment figure for mothers whose youngest is aged 15 to 17 is 70.6 percent. In 1987 the comparable participation rates were 34.1 percent, 59 percent and 66.8 percent, respectively.

Women 35 and older constitute the majority of the women in Japan's labor force, 66.9 percent in 1990. Most members of this age group do not work because they are the sole family support; the majority has a husband, who, presumably,

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works. About 10 percent of this age group, however, never has been married; thus, these women seek employment opportunities that give them a decent living. A similarly small percentage represents women who are heads of household, a reflection of Japan's low divorce rate (1.28 per 1,000 people in 1990) and the limited number of widows in the working-age group. (A 1988 survey indicated that about 30 percent of the 849,000 single-parent households had lost a father through death; the remaining 70 percent resulted from divorce.)

In slightly less than three-quarters of the divorces mothers receive custody of the children; a 1989 Ministry of Health and Welfare study said these women averaged about two-fifths the income of households in which a father is present -- Y2.27 million or $16,800 a year at Y135=$1.00 compared to Y5.45 million or $40,400. Public assistance for mothers and children in 1989 went to roughly 4 percent of the households listed that year as containing one parent and offspring.

The rising cost of living, however, does play a role in encouraging housewives to work, according to Hisako Hirota, a professor at Japan Women's University. Writing that the "stay-at-home housewife has become, by and large, economically unfeasible," Ms. Hirota also stated, "The development of Japan's economy has created not only a demand for cheap housewife labor but also a demand by the housewives themselves for work."[1]

Yet, even if economic necessity plays a role, the perception in Japan is that women workers as a whole are a supplementary source of household income. Supplemental also has been the primary label for their role in the business world. That image is changing, partly as a result of the current labor shortage but also because more women view work as an important part of their lives. What often is overlooked, however, is whether good employment opportunities are available to women.

Avenues of Employment

Japan's strong manufacturing and service sectors have provided women with an increasing source of employment, as can be seen in Tables 1 and 2. The opportunities in 1989 (the latest data available for a broad range of gender-based analysis) included more work in big manufacturing companies, although small and midsized manufacturers not only continued to hire a larger percentage of women but had a better balance in new hirees between men and women (see Table 3). Similarly, large service-sector firms, while employing added numbers of women, continued to lag behind their small and medium-sized counterparts, which in recent years consistently have hired more women than men.

A plurality of women (33.5 percent of all female employees in 1989) work in wholesale and retail trade (including restaurants and bars), finance, insurance or real estate. If the services category (which covers hotels, information services, advertising, recreation and miscellaneous repair shops) is included, the majority of female employees (64.4 percent) would be represented. Manufacturing comes in a strong third, employing slightly more than one-fourth (26.5 percent in 1989) of all female employees.

[1]Hisako Hirota, Japanese Women Today (Tokyo: International Society for Educational Information, 1988), p. 3.

Table 1: New Hires by Selected Industries, 1987-89

	Manufacturing			Finance, Insurance and Real Estate			Services		
	1987	1988	1989	1987	1988	1989	1987	1988	1989
New Hires	1,212,200	1,433,600	1,428,400	271,600	317,700	305,800	946,300	1,176,800	1,081,500
Males	628,100	777,000	765,300	67,500	79,300	75,600	379,100	499,300	438,400
Part-time	26,800	34,100	27,600	800	300	1,800	31,200	63,600	41,100
Females	584,100	656,700	663,100	204,100	238,200	230,200	567,200	677,600	643,100
Part-time	206,000	216,900	209,900	31,500	18,600	19,800	101,300	157,100	132,000
Openings	1,361,573	1,893,126	2,112,446	118,325	116,470	121,884	837,066	1,241,640	1,072,484
Temporary	141,672	175,844	176,239	2,621	2,969	2,281	57,893	60,000	61,473
Regular	1,219,901	1,717,282	1,936,207	115,704	113,501	119,603	779,173	1,181,640	1,011,011

Source: Ministry of Labor, Yearbook of Labor Statistics.

Table 2: Newly Hired Employees by Selected Industry, Gender and Age, 1987-89

		Manufacturing			Finance, Insurance and Real Estate			Services		
		1987	1988	1989	1987	1988	1989	1987	1988	1989
Total		1,212,200	1,433,600	1,428,400	271,600	317,700	305,800	946,300	1,081,500	1,176,800
Male	Under 20	129,500	155,700	167,400	3,200	1,700	3,800	38,100	54,000	52,600
	20-24	149,700	181,400	186,100	27,500	33,900	38,500	104,800	112,200	140,500
	25-29	67,300	89,600	92,100	4,800	9,900	11,200	65,600	63,900	77,200
	30-34	48,800	74,600	68,700	5,100	8,400	4,200	42,500	42,900	49,300
	35-44	87,500	122,200	111,200	9,400	10,300	7,100	49,000	50,500	62,000
	45-54	71,600	89,100	81,100	8,500	10,200	5,700	30,400	45,400	38,500
	55-59	34,800	40,100	36,000	6,800	2,500	4,600	20,400	32,100	30,100
	60 and Over	22,100	24,400	22,700	1,900	2,500	1,400	23,100	37,500	49,100
Female	Under 20	124,200	124,600	126,700	29,200	18,600	22,200	86,000	95,000	82,400
	20-24	101,000	126,100	131,700	50,500	54,000	62,200	199,800	198,600	222,800
	25-29	45,000	53,600	54,500	27,600	34,500	29,300	77,200	86,200	79,000
	30-34	62,800	66,300	64,100	28,100	39,000	46,500	41,400	48,200	52,000
	35-44	153,700	171,500	165,800	44,700	70,900	53,300	73,400	92,300	111,100
	45-54	78,600	91,600	98,300	19,000	17,200	14,100	54,300	75,700	77,500
	55-59	13,000	16,000	14,500	3,700	4,000	2,000	20,000	25,500	28,900
	60 and Over	5,900	6,900	7,500	1,200	200	600	15,000	21,500	23,900

Source: Ministry of Labor, Yearbook of Labor Statistics.

Table 3: Newly Hired Employees by Size of Firm and Gender for Selected Industries, 1987-89

(in thousands)

	Manufacturing					Finance, Insurance and Real Estate					Services				
	5-29	30-99	100-299	300-999	1000+	5-29	30-99	100-299	300-999	1000+	5-29	30-99	100-299	300-999	1000+
1987: Male	183.1	133.7	130.0	72.1	108.9	7.1	5.5	5.7	10.5	35.7	107.8	64.8	81.0	49.7	39.6
Female	145.8	131.3	151.9	63.6	91.5	10.8	6.0	8.3	21.9	155.2	170.9	93.3	130.2	62.4	36.8
1988: Male	177.0	181.1	148.9	110.2	159.4	17.9*	5.9	11.3	13.6	28.9	111.4	82.3	104.4	56.1	57.1
Female	132.4	174.9	147.7	105.6	95.2	10.6	15.6	15.4	12.9	181.5	173.0	132.7	152.5	86.6	46.8
1989: Male	138.6	169.3	130.9	113.3	212.8	7.2	6.0	15.8	11.0	34.7	142.0	100.5	101.6	63.1	58.6
Female	137.4	164.1	146.8	107.4	106.2	11.6	10.6	6.8	13.6	186.0	197.5	136.4	159.2	82.4	49.7

Source: Ministry of Labor, Yearbook of Labor Statistics.

Not all women who are in the labor force draw a paycheck per se. For example, the mom-and-pop shopkeepers and other family workers (8.3 percent of all workers were categorized in 1990 as family workers, and of these 82.3 percent were women) might not receive wages, but they still figure into the work force. Also included are those under contract for jobs inside the home, such as piecework for factories. Tutoring in various studies may be included, but in her book on Japanese women workers Mary Saso noted that Japanese data probably are on the low side since many women do not describe as "employment" their tutoring, calligraphy or other types of work that often are paid for through a discreetly offered envelope.[2]

Thus, a majority of women over the age of 15 count as members of Japan's labor force; most of these are employees. That is not a new phenomenon (see Table 4). What is significant is the slow but steady growth in the number of women who are regular employees (see Table 5).

Putting More Women To Work

As of June 1991 women made up 41.2 percent of Japan's labor force. That compared with 39.8 percent in 1986 when unemployment reached levels considered high in Japan. The higher ratio this year is not surprising given the current tight labor market. For example, the job-opening-to-applicant ratio has been above 1 since May 1988; in June it was 1.43, meaning that 143 jobs were available for every 100 job seekers.

Significantly, the 1.4 percentage point difference in the share of the labor force represented by women parallels a post-1986 increase in regular jobs held by women. Employers have two main hiring options: either employing more people in regular jobs or using extra part-time and/or temporary workers. A temporary worker is hired for a predetermined time and, except for not receiving some fringe benefits, may work in positions similar to those of regular workers. Part-time status, too, may be little more than an empty description, although part-timers technically work under 35 hours a week.

Among the biggest fans of part-time and temporary work are married women, especially those with children. An estimated 53.7 percent of Japanese mothers work outside the home. Of these, 31 percent had part-time jobs, while 22.7 percent worked full-time, according to 1988 figures from the Management and Coordination Agency. Similarly, a 1988 Ministry of Labor summary of labor market conditions ~~for~~ women noted that 41.5 percent of the jobs held by married women in 1987 were part-time or nonpermanent jobs. A recent employment firm survey of housewives aged 20-29 showed that although 15.4 percent said they would like regular employment, 74.8 percent of those interviewed said they preferred part-time work to give them more time at home. The magazine that reported the survey, Torabayu, noted that the prevalence of part-time work has encouraged more women to enter, or return to, Japan's labor force.[3]

[2]Mary Saso, Women in the Japanese Workplace (London: Hilary Shipman, 1990), p. 4.

[3]"Minna Dou Shite Ritaan Suru No?" ("Why are women returning to work?"), Torabayu, No. 28, July 26, 1991, pp. 6-8.

Table 4: Women Employees, Family Workers and Self-Employed, 1985-89

(in thousands)

	Nonagricultural Industries			Agriculture		
	Employees	Family	Self-Employed	Employees	Family	Self-Employed
1985	15,390	2,790	2,480	90	1,820	410
1986	15,740	2,780	2,460	110	1,740	400
1987	16,040	2,820	2,450	100	1,730	390
1988	16,600	2,810	2,450	110	1,670	380
1989	17,380	2,760	2,450	110	1,610	360

Source: Ministry of Labor, Yearbook of Labor Statistics.

Table 5: Women Workers by Employment Status by Industry, 1987-89

(in thousands)

Industry	Year	Total	Employees		Self-Employed	Family
			Regular	Temporary		
Manufacturing	1987	5,590	3,420	690	810	500
	1988	5,710	3,520	700	810	490
	1989	5,900	3,720	700	840	470
Trade and Finance*	1987	7,630	4,240	950	770	1,460
	1988	7,800	4,390	980	750	1,450
	1989	7,950	4,550	1,040	720	1,400
Services	1987	6,310	4,130	660	850	530
	1988	6,520	4,280	690	870	530
	1989	6,780	4,470	750	870	540
Government	1987	340	250	70	--	--
	1988	330	240	70	--	--
	1989	330	240	70	--	--

*Includes wholesale and retail trade, eating and drinking establishments, finance, insurance and real estate.

Source: Ministry of Labor, Yearbook of Labor Statistics.

Employers like to hire part-time and temporary workers, in part because of the flexibility this type of staffing gives them to cope with business fluctuations but mainly because part-time and temporary employees cost less in terms of wages and benefits. Professor Hirota of Japan Women's University noted in a 1988 report that the main employers of part-time workers are small companies, which also pay lower wages than bigger firms to their full-time employees. As an example of the differences between company size and pay for full- and part-time workers, she suggested that a part-timer would get the equivalent of 67 percent of a full-time worker's pay at a large company. At a medium-sized

firm a full-time worker would get 72 percent and a part-timer 54 percent of a full-time employee's pay at a big firm, while in small businesses a full-time employee might get 60 percent and a part-timer 52 percent of the pay enjoyed by a full-time worker at a large firm.[4]

Despite the attractions of part-time and temporary work for both employers and married women, the number of women employed as regular workers rose 1.1 percentage points between the economy's slow growth year of 1986 and 1989, the third full year of the current economic expansion. In 1989 females filled 33.7 percent of Japan's regular full-time jobs compared with 32.6 percent in 1986 when the country's Equal Employment Opportunity Law went into effect.

The growth in regular jobs for women indicates that the "cushion effect" may be losing some of its firmness, especially if a recent decline in women's share of the market for part-time and temporary jobs is not just an aberration. The "cushion effect" theory contends that women, who typically hold the majority of part-time and temporary jobs, bear the brunt of layoffs, thus providing the cushion for business ups and downs. But, while part-time and temporary positions as a percentage of new hires and overall employment are growing, women's share in both has slipped since 1986. That year temporary workers accounted for 5.5 percent of all employment, and women held 73.7 percent of these nonpermanent jobs. Part-time positions in 1986 represented 20.7 percent of all new hirings, and women filled 80.6 percent of these slots. In 1989 women's share of the 6.1 percent of all jobs that were temporary was 72.6 percent. Part-time hirings as a percentage of all newly filled positions ran at 22 percent, of which women made up 78.7 percent. One explanation of the lower shares for women is that more men appear to be attracted to the flexibility of working in a temporary or part-time job. In its 1991 annual report on labor market conditions the Ministry of Labor contended that the continued growth in part-time jobs throughout Japan corresponds to increased interest in a more enjoyable life-style rather than the demands of a lifetime career.

Pay Differentials and Other Issues

"Equal pay for equal work," recognized in principle by the 1947 Labor Standards Law, carries little clout as a rallying cry for employment equality since, like here, job descriptions in Japan often obscure the concept of equal work. The pay picture, too, is cloudy since take-home pay depends on various components -- educational background, seniority and overtime as well as a system of bonuses and benefits that corresponds somewhat to each worker's individual situation (see JEI Report No. 40A, October 19, 1990). In almost every part of the private sector a woman's average monthly pay (which excludes bonuses and overtime as well as supplemental benefits) ranks well below that of a male employee.[5] This is true, on average, even when educational levels and the time

[4]Hirota, op. cit., p. 8.

[5]In a study paper submitted to the Joint Economic Committee, Congress of the United States, M. Anne Hill estimated that the average female employee in Japan earned almost half (51 percent) of the average male worker's pay in 1988, which was down from a high of 56 percent in 1978. The growth in the female labor force, she noted, was accompanied by a drop in earnings vis-a-vis male counterparts. M. Anne Hill, "Women in the Japanese Labor Force," Japan's Economic Challenge (Washington, D.C.: Government Printing Office, 1990), pp. 262-263.

spent working are similar. Graphs 1-5 show the disparities in various parameters for a large company, defined as a firm with 1,000-plus employees. The averages, however, fail to take into account differences between job categories within the firm and may be distorted by various other factors, such as the number of managers in a given category that are male or female. Nevertheless, the figures give a base for comparison. Of particular interest are the nearly equal starting pay levels for senior high graduates across all industries. Only in the services sector does that degree of pay equity last into the early 20s.

Shortfall in Higher Education - Several conjectures are possible on the inconsistencies between wages and years worked. One is that fewer women than men in a particular industry might have a college education; thus, they would have lower average pay. A 1990 report by the Japan Institute of Women's Employment noted, for example, that a woman with a high school education might receive only 75.7 percent of the pay of her college-educated counterpart. The report further said that college graduates comprised 24.1 percent of the male work force, whereas college graduates made up only 4.8 percent of the ranks of female workers.[6] A greater percentage of women (95.6 percent in 1990) than men (93.2 percent) entered the noncompulsory upper grades of high school, but fewer women than men go on to enroll in four-year colleges. In 1990 women heading to junior college numbered 22.2 percent of female high school graduates; 15.3 percent of the female graduating class went to a four-year college. More than twice as many male high school graduates (33.4 percent) enrolled in a four-year college that year; only 1.7 percent went to a junior college. In 1989 men outnumbered women on college campuses by almost 3-to-1, but female enrollments are rising.[7]

What cannot be determined from Table 6 is whether a career woman is paid the same as her male colleague for a similar job, given equivalent educational backgrounds. This situation reportedly occurs in government employment, but data for the private sector are difficult to find. In principle, however, the law forbids pay discrimination based on gender for equal work.

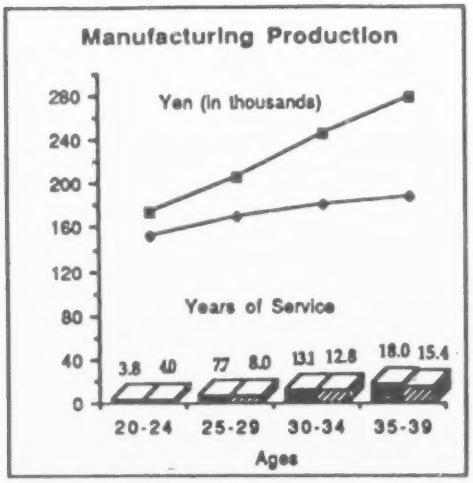
Dropout Rate and Seniority - One of the often-cited reasons for women generally earning less than men is that they fail to achieve seniority through an unbroken employment record, an achievement that wins high marks in a seniority-based employment system. Although Japanese career women do marry and have children, the typical female employee often is considered one who will quit work to have children, stay home with them at least until they enter school and then reenter the work force. This pattern is dramatically evident in the "M" shape that depicts women's labor force participation rates in Japan (see Graph 6). The 75.1 percent participation rate of women aged 20 to 24 in 1990 dipped to a low of 51.7 percent for those aged 30 to 34 before rising to another peak of 71.7 percent among those aged 45 to 49. At age 50 women once again begin to drop out of the labor force (see Table 7).

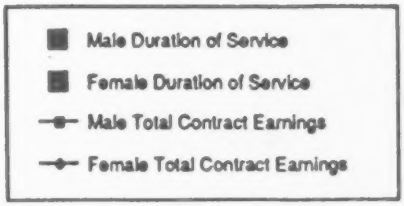
The Ministry of Labor's 1991 white paper on labor, which noted that 1990 employment figures showed fewer women in the 30-34 age bracket dropping out

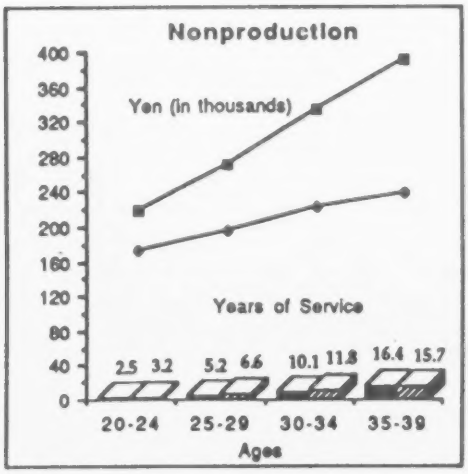
[6]Japan's Working Women Today (Tokyo: Japan Institute of Women's Employment, 1990), pp. 10-11.

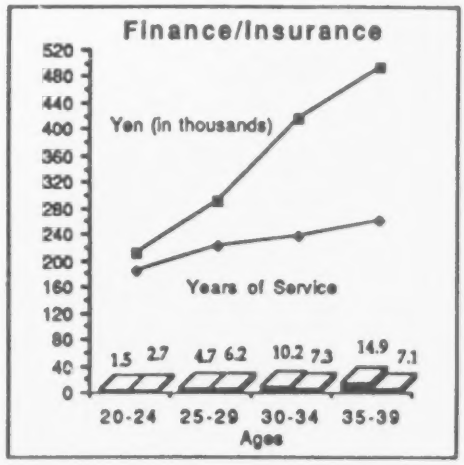
[7]Japanese Women Yesterday and Today (Tokyo: Foreign Press Center, 1991), p. 11.

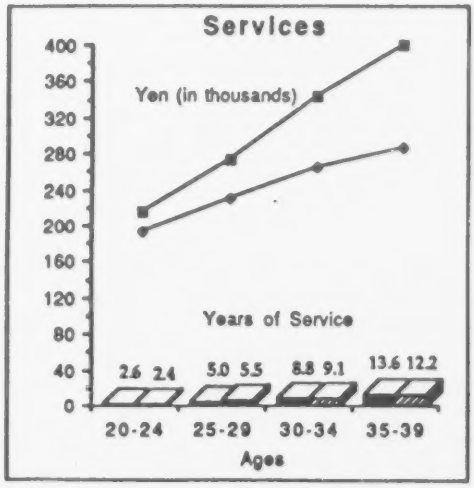
Graphs 1-5: Monthly Wa[illegible], Age and Years of Service for Japanese Men and Women











Source: Ministry of Labor

Table 6: Employee Profiles for Firms with One Thousand or More Employees, 1989

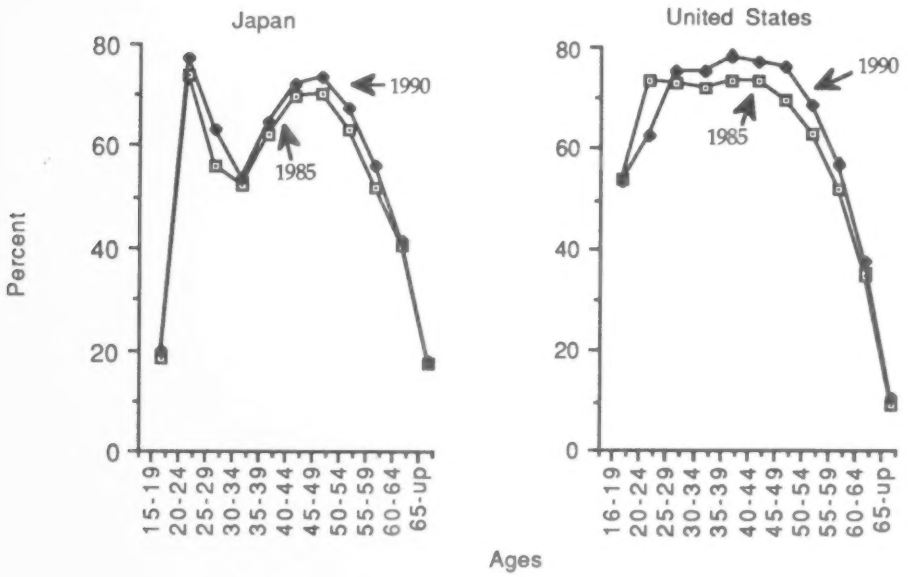
(in thousands of yen and thousands of persons)

	Senior High		Junior College		College/University		Ages 20-24		Ages 25-29		Ages 30-34		Ages 35-39		Ages 40-44	
	Men	Women	Men	Women	Men	Women	Men	Women	Men	Women	Men	Women	Men	Women	Men	Women
Manufacturing: Production																
Average Age	35.0	35.9	—	—	—	—	22.6	22.4	27.3	27.1	32.7	32.4	37.6	37.6	42.3	42.2
Duration of Service	10.5	6.6	—	—	—	—	3.8	4.0	7.7	8.0	13.1	12.8	18.0	15.4	21.2	15.1
Scheduled Hours	176	181	—	—	—	—	165	170	164	170	164	168	163	170	163	170
Unscheduled Hours	30	9	—	—	—	—	n.a.	n.a.	n.a.	n.a.	n.a.	n.a.	n.a.	n.a.	n.a.	n.a.
Scheduled Earnings/Month	Y222.4	Y130.6	—	—	—	—	Y166.6	Y145.3	Y198.4	Y162.7	Y238.2	Y174.3	Y271.9	Y181.5	Y296.9	Y175.2
Contract Earnings/Month	Y272.6	Y139.4	—	—	—	—	Y220.2	Y159.4	Y259.4	Y175.5	Y305.9	Y188.7	Y346.9	Y198.7	Y377.2	Y191.9
Average Starting Wage/Month*	Y128.4	Y123.0	—	Y135.1	Y162.7	—										
Ratio of New Grad Hires	77.5			6.2		12.4										
Manufacturing: Nonproduction																
Average Age	40.4	31.5	35.5	26.9	37.3	29.2	23.3	22.7	27.4	27.9	32.4	32.3	37.7	37.4	42.4	42.2
Duration of Service	16.7	7.2	11.3	4.5	12.1	5.0	2.5	3.2	5.2	6.6	10.1	11.8	16.4	15.7	20.9	18.1
Scheduled Hours	177	179	176	174	173	171	170	169	169	166	168	166	167	167	168	168
Unscheduled Hours	20	9	24	9	18	12	n.a.	n.a.	n.a.	n.a.	n.a.	n.a.	n.a.	n.a.	n.a.	n.a.
Scheduled Earnings/Month	Y303.5	Y161.8	Y276.5	Y162.8	Y329.9	Y201.6	Y170.3	Y152.2	Y207.9	Y199.6	Y264.1	Y199.6	Y323.1	Y212.9	Y384.7	Y232.4
Contract Earnings/Month	Y340.7	171.3	Y315.0	Y173.3	Y362.7	Y219.5	Y208.5	Y163.4	Y260.6	Y214.9	Y324.5	Y214.6	Y382.6	Y229.9	Y431.7	Y251.3
Wholesale and Retail Trade																
Average Age	37.4	28.3	33.7	26.2	35.8	26.9	23.1	22.5	27.4	27.0	32.4	32.4	37.7	37.5	42.1	42.1
Duration of Service	16.2	7.1	11.7	5.0	11.9	4.0	2.1	2.9	5.1	6.4	9.6	10.6	15.5	14.1	19.0	14.2
Scheduled Hours	174	171	175	168	171	168	174	171	174	168	174	165	173	168	171	169
Unscheduled Hours	16	8	20	10	12	11	n.a.	n.a.	n.a.	n.a.	n.a.	n.a.	n.a.	n.a.	n.a.	n.a.
Scheduled Earnings/Month	Y313.3	Y170.5	Y278.8	Y176.8	Y343.1	Y191.6	Y172.3	Y154.1	Y214.8	Y181.8	Y276.0	Y209.8	Y343.6	Y225.4	Y414.4	Y222.3
Contract Earnings/Month	Y339.9	Y180.7	Y310.9	Y190.9	Y365.0	Y207.1	Y196.9	Y164.1	Y246.4	Y195.2	Y308.2	Y222.8	Y372.2	Y243.9	Y434.8	Y236.6
Average Starting Wage/Month	Y126.0	Y123.8	—	Y135.9	Y161.4	—										
Ratio of New Grad Hires	44.8			16.6		33.0										
Finance and Insurance																
Average Age	43.6	37.7	43.9	27.9	36.0	29.6	23.7	22.5	27.4	27.1	32.6	32.5	37.5	37.6	42.4	42.2
Duration of Service	20.2	7.9	14.5	4.5	12.0	3.6	1.5	2.7	4.7	6.2	10.2	7.3	14.9	7.1	19.6	7.2
Scheduled Hours	157	152	155	153	157	155	158	156	158	154	157	151	157	150	157	149
Unscheduled Hours	12	5	9	11	14	10	n.a.	n.a.	n.a.	n.a.	n.a.	n.a.	n.a.	n.a.	n.a.	n.a.
Scheduled Earnings/Month	Y430.1	Y245.0	Y382.2	Y195.3	Y397.2	Y220.3	Y176.1	Y156.7	Y241.2	Y192.1	Y354.8	Y212.7	Y436.7	Y241.2	Y506.1	Y282.8
Contract Earnings/Month	Y463.4	Y253.6	Y401.7	Y210.3	Y429.1	Y235.1	Y198.2	Y171.3	Y278.7	Y210.4	Y403.2	Y225.5	Y480.5	Y249.3	Y536.9	Y287.8
Average Starting Wage/Month	Y122.0	Y117.4	—	Y133.1	Y155.9	—										
Ratio of New Grad Hires**	23.0			28.3		44.7										
Services																
Average Age	37.6	32.4	34.7	29.5	36.9	30.9	23.0	22.7	27.4	27.1	32.6	32.3	37.5	37.6	42.2	42.4
Duration of Service	13.6	8.1	10.1	6.4	11.2	6.7	2.6	2.4	5.0	5.5	8.8	9.1	13.6	12.2	17.8	12.7
Scheduled Hours	170	169	169	166	164	165	170	167	166	165	167	164	168	167	165	170
Unscheduled Hours	22	10	21	11	18	11	n.a.	n.a.	n.a.	n.a.	n.a.	n.a.	n.a.	n.a.	n.a.	n.a.
Scheduled Earnings/Month	Y285.7	Y193.0	Y266.3	Y210.8	Y370.1	Y244.8	Y170.4	Y164.6	Y215.1	Y195.8	Y280.5	Y231.7	Y345.1	Y254.0	Y408.8	Y255.8
Contract Earnings/Month	Y322.7	Y210.7	Y305.0	Y238.1	Y410.9	Y266.8	Y206.2	Y185.7	Y264.5	Y221.2	Y335.5	Y256.7	Y390.7	Y279.1	Y443.1	Y277.3
Average Starting Wage/Month	Y128.1	Y123.6	—	Y137.7	Y165.6	—										
Ratio of New Grad Hires	27.5			20.0		36.3										

*All manufacturing workers.
**Includes real estate.

Source: Ministry of Labor, Yearbook of Labor Statistics.

Graph 6: Women in the Labor Force, 1985 and 1990



Source: Ministry of Labor and Department of Labor

(participation topped 51.7 percent comapred with 51.2 percent in 1989), cited the demands of child care as the main reason women in that age group quit work. Past MOL surveys indicate that very few women actually list maternal matters as their reason for quitting work (see Table 8). The primary reason given, "one's own convenience," raises questions about whether women felt compelled to keep their reasons private or whether some hesitated to admit taking a traditional approach. Nevertheless, most analysts contend that women by and large quit work for family reasons.

Protectiveness - The dual concern of government for equal employment opportunities and preservation of the family collide on the question of whether limits on the number of hours worked are appropriate for female employees. What this means in practice is that a woman's opportunities to earn more money and collegial goodwill by working overtime are severely restricted. (Graph 7 depicts the additional earnings possible from overtime.) These restrictions do not affect women holding professional and managerial posts or those employed in certain occupations for which exemptions are granted, including technical positions. The government contends that working women would suffer if no limits were placed on working hours since "women presently bear most of the burden of housework, child care, and other housekeeping duties."[8]

In manufacturing nonmanagerial women -- even those who are unmarried and presumably have fewer family obligations -- are prohibited from working on holidays, as are those in the health, sanitation, hotel, food, entertainment and

[8] Japan's Working Women Today, op. cit., p. 21.

Table 7: Women's Labor Force Participation Rate by Age, 1984-89*

(in millions)

	Total Population	20-24 Popu-lation	20-24 Labor Force	25-29 Popu-lation	25-29 Labor Force	30-34 Popu-lation	30-34 Labor Force	35-39 Popu-lation	35-39 Labor Force	40-44 Popu-lation	40-44 Labor Force	45-49 Popu-lation	45-49 Labor Force	50-54 Popu-lation	50-54 Labor Force	55-59 Popu-lation	55-59 Labor Force	60-64 Popu-lation	60-64 Labor Force	65+ Popu-lation	65+ Labor Force
1984	120.05	3.92	2.84 (2.70)	3.93	2.12 (2.02)	4.82	2.44 (2.36)	4.98	2.97 (2.89)	4.64	3.16 (3.09)	4.13	2.77 (2.72)	3.92	2.39 (2.34)	3.50	1.78 (1.74)	2.92	1.11 (1.10)	6.99	1.11 (1.10)
1985	120.78	4.02	2.89 (2.76)	3.88	2.10 (2.00)	4.53	2.29 (2.22)	5.28	3.17 (3.09)	4.61	3.13 (3.07)	4.14	2.82 (2.77)	4.00	2.44 (2.40)	3.57	1.82 (1.78)	3.01	1.16 (1.14)	7.27	1.13 (1.12)
1986	121.43	4.00	2.95 (2.81)	3.85	2.10 (2.00)	4.30	2.15 (2.08)	5.59	3.41 (3.32)	4.39	3.02 (2.95)	4.20	2.86 (2.81)	4.07	2.51 (2.46)	3.65	1.82 (1.78)	3.11	1.20 (1.18)	7.55	1.15 (1.14)
1987	122.11	4.06	2.99 (2.86)	3.85	2.19 (2.08)	4.12	2.08 (2.02)	5.48	3.36 (3.27)	4.46	3.05 (2.98)	4.31	2.95 (2.89)	4.11	2.54 (2.49)	3.72	1.89 (1.85)	3.22	1.24 (1.21)	7.90	1.22 (1.22)
1988	122.63	4.18	3.08 (2.95)	3.88	2.26 (2.16)	3.99	2.03 (1.97)	5.17	3.17 (3.10)	4.73	3.22 (3.15)	4.40	3.05 (3.00)	4.12	2.61 (2.57)	3.81	1.94 (1.90)	3.32	1.28 (1.26)	8.21	1.29 (1.28)
1989	123.13	4.28	3.18 (3.06)	3.89	2.32 (2.23)	3.93	2.01 (1.95)	4.81	3.00 (2.94)	4.96	3.41 (3.36)	4.60	3.25 (3.20)	4.08	2.62 (2.58)	3.85	2.01 (1.97)	3.42	1.34 (1.31)	8.52	1.35 (1.34)

*Labor force participation covers both the employed and those who were available for work during the survey week. Includes those seeking jobs and school graduates not yet employed. The figures in parentheses indicate women considered employed, including those who qualify as unpaid family workers and the self-employed as long as they worked one hour in the survey week.

Source: Ministry of Labor, Yearbook of Labor Statistics.

Table 8: Reasons for Termination of Employment by Selected Industries, 1989

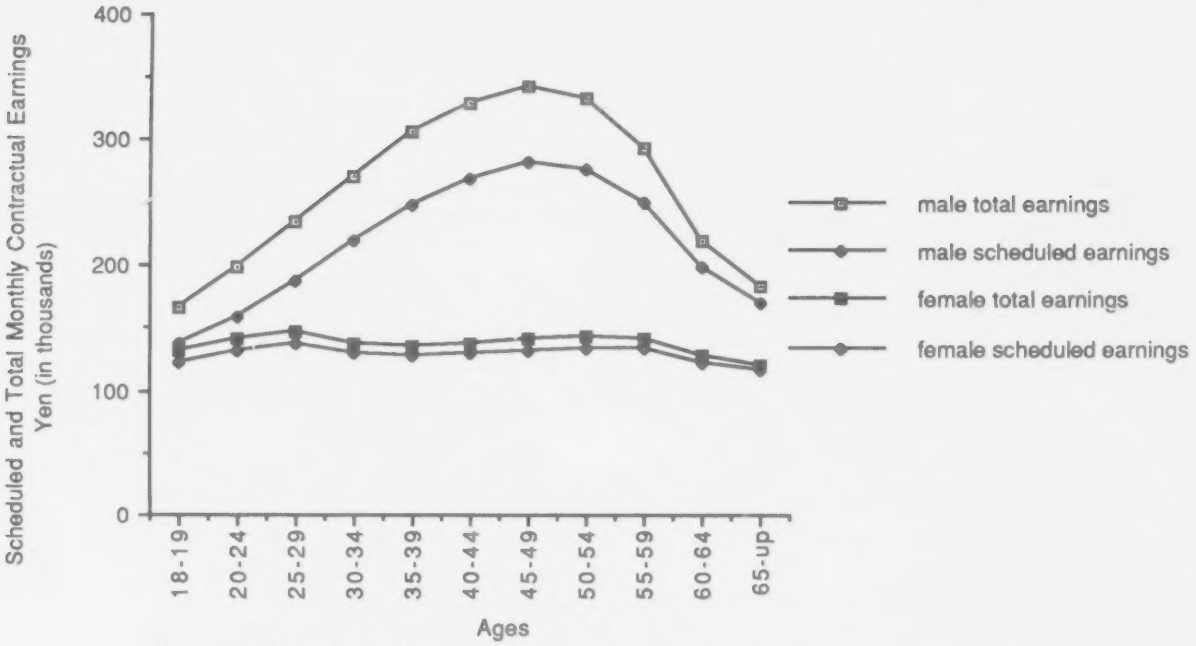
(in thousands)

	Total Men	Total Women	Termination of Contract Men	Termination of Contract Women	Employer's Convenience Men	Employer's Convenience Women	Temporary Transfer Men	Temporary Transfer Women	Rehired by Old Firm Men	Rehired by Old Firm Women	Retirement Age Men	Retirement Age Women	Own Convenience Men	Own Convenience Women	Own Responsibility Men	Own Responsibility Women	Marriage/ Children Men	Marriage/ Children Women	Sickness/ Injury Men	Sickness/ Injury Women
All Industries	2,026.8	2,364.0	122.7	126.6	194.3	105.2	51.5	6.6	37.8	2.6	131.6	44.5	1,422.6	1,993.6	110.3	55.2	0.9	330.2	45.3	38.8
Manufacturing	708.2	714.3	70.0	29.3	56.4	31.7	16.2	1.8	9.0	1.2	49.5	20.0	479.5	602.2	33.1	16.0	0.5	85.6	19.7	15.1
Wholesale and Retail Trade*	523.5	750.5	11.0	15.8	38.6	27.6	11.5	0.5	12.9	0.5	13.1	8.5	416.9	669.6	37.6	20.0	0.0	112.5	6.3	9.0
Finance and Insurance	40.4	186.9	0.7	2.9	8.1	4.4	4.6	0.2	0.2	0.1	9.0	2.4	20.9	172.7	0.2	0.9	0.0	36.1	1.5	3.6
Real Estate	13.3	12.1	0.1	0.9	2.8	0.3	1.6	0.1	0.5	0.0	1.0	0.2	7.3	8.6	1.9	2.7	0.0	2.9	0.1	0.3
Services	481.1	604.7	24.0	52.6	65.1	37.1	9.7	3.3	12.7	0.7	24.5	11.0	342.3	482.2	14.9	11.9	0.1	79.7	10.3	9.9

*Includes eating and drinking establishments.

Source: Ministry of Labor, Yearbook of Labor Statistics.

Graph 7: Manufacturing Production Workers Earnings by Gender and Age, 1989



Source: Ministry of Labor

recreation industries. Women employed in sales, finance, insurance, educational research and garbage incineration can work an extra day every four weeks. Moreover, a weekly limit of six hours of overtime generally applies for women in manufacturing, with the cap slightly looser (depending on one's interpretation) -- 12 hours over two weeks -- for women not exempt in occupations relating to health and tourism. Finance, sales and similar workers described above have a ceiling of 24 hours of overtime within a four-week period. Other restrictions also apply to pregnant employees; work considered detrimental to their health is banned, for example.

On top of the overtime restrictions is a virtual ban on late-night work, between 10 p.m. and 5 a.m., for most women. Prior to 1986 the Labor Standards Law prohibited almost all women, including professionals and managers, from late-night work. (Exceptions included nurses as well as television and radio announcers.) Critics complained that this prohibition gave employers a good reason not to promote women. Since implementation of the Equal Employment Opportunity Law in 1986, the late-night ban has not applied to female taxi drivers, newspaper deliverers or others where late-night and early-morning work is considered essential. Otherwise, the ban still applies, and it is enforced. Tokyo labor inspectors filed charges in early August against Northwest Airlines after the company's labor union complained that seven women had worked up to four hours beyond the legal limits in a three-month period last year. The labor inspectors also accused the airline of exceeding the 10:30 p.m. limit allowed under a special extension for female employees of airline companies.

This dispute, still under investigation, highlights the role of labor unions in women's employment issues. The groups within company-affiliated labor unions that deal with women's issues have been compared to "social clubs with a

correspondingly low status" by author Mary Saso in her book on Japanese women workers.[9] Although Ms. Saso noted that the male-dominated unions presumably have an interest in defending fair pay for women as a way of supporting overall employee compensation, she raises the question of how supportive unions have been on issues where women might challenge men for jobs.

Few Managers - Another reason for broad differences in pay levels between male and female employees is the scarcity of women at the management level. This issue is tied to arguments that fewer women have the continuous employment at a firm that would win them a managerial position under Japan's seniority-based reward structure. But even when women have proved in court that they had worked continuously for a firm and that most of their male cohorts were part of the managerial ranks, they have not always succeeded in gaining legal redress. Ms. Saso refers to a 1987 case in which seven women won agreement from a lower court that they had been discriminated against for promotion; they ultimately lost the case when their employer, a bank, appealed the verdict.[10]

Among the reasons given by employers for not promoting women to management positions are: their tendency to be educated in the humanities rather than more business-related fields; the traditional expectation that women will quit to have a baby or that their family and personal lives are more important to them than the company; the perceived difficulty of scheduling education and training or even rotation to other cities (typical for many large companies) because of a woman's family obligations; and the conventional theory that women are less willing to spend long hours either at work or socializing afterward.[11] Men also have admitted to being hesitant to work for a female boss (see JEI Report No. 18A, May 5, 1989).

Nevertheless, women gradually are moving into management positions (see Table 9). A 1989 Labor Ministry survey found that 6.3 percent of the companies responding had at least one female department head, while 15.9 percent of the respondents had appointed women to be section chiefs. Of all the women employed, however, only 1.2 percent were department heads and just 2.1 percent section chiefs. The survey further noted that about 60 percent of those attaining at least section chief status had never married and 72 percent had been employed continuously by the company.[12]

A private 1989 survey noted that in many respects Japanese women did not necessarily conform to stereotypes about achieving management-level positions. Whereas 22.5 percent of Americans and 19.5 percent of the British women answering the poll said they expected such success by staying in one company, only 9.1 percent of the Japanese respondents did. The experience gained by working for several companies was the pathway to a management job anticipated by 7.2 percent of the American respondents, 3.1 percent of the Japanese and 2.9 percent of the British. Gaining "expert" status in one company seemed the best

[9]Saso, op. cit., p. 76.

[10]Saso, op. cit., p. 72.

[11]Japanese Women Yesterday and Today, op. cit., pp. 17-18.

[12]Japanese Women Yesterday and Today, op. cit., p. 18.

Table 9: Employment by Gender and Occupation, 1983-89*

(in thousands)

	Professional/ Technical		Managers/ Officials		Clerical Workers		Sales Workers		Farm, Fishery/ Forestry Workers	
	Men	Women	Men	Women	Men	Women	Men	Women	Men	Women
1983	2,660	2,320	2,020	130	4,540	5,440	5,410	3,280	2,690	2,520
1984	2,870	2,400	2,000	130	4,600	5,610	5,440	3,260	2,610	2,440
1985	2,930	2,450	1,970	140	4,530	5,680	5,370	3,240	2,610	2,410
1986	2,940	2,500	1,970	160	4,460	5,860	5,510	3,310	2,560	2,330
1987	3,450	2,630	2,060	170	4,370	5,950	5,640	3,440	2,540	2,300
1988	3,620	2,700	2,110	170	4,440	6,210	5,880	3,530	2,460	2,230
1989	3,850	2,810	2,160	190	4,490	6,530	5,710	3,560	2,410	2,170

*Annual figures are averages for the year.

Source: Ministry of Labor, Yearbook of Labor Statistics.

method for 21.4 percent of the Americans in the poll, 18.1 percent of the Japanese and 16.9 percent of the British. More British respondents (8.8 percent) saw the possibility for success by being an expert at many companies, whereas 7.9 percent of the Japanese respondents and 6.2 percent of the Americans polled favored this method. Entrepreneurial action topped the list for Americans at 24.7 percent, while 17.3 percent of the British and 13.3 percent of the Japanese respondents agreed that this was the way to win a management position. Most Japanese surveyed (49.5 percent) named "other," which the pollster said possibly indicated that the respondents had no specific career outlook; this choice attracted 23.5 percent of the British and 17.9 percent of the Americans.[13]

Given the importance in Japan of preserving family stability and the presumption that women are predominantly responsible for making sure home life runs smoothly, working women who want pay equity and advancement opportunities have to make hard choices concerning careers and family. These choices may be no different than elsewhere in the industrialized world. In Japan, however, various programs and laws, including the 1985 Equal Employment Opportunity Law, often put these choices in a different framework.

Good Intentions

Equal Employment Opportunity Law - Past discriminatory practices in gender-based job advertisements, hiring, assignments and promotions were forbidden under the Equal Employment Opportunity Law; complaints were to be mediated or submitted to arbitration committees. The law, however, laid out no sanctions for violations. Now that the law has been in effect for five years,

[13]Foundation of Professional Women, Working Women Fact Book (Tokyo: Toyo Keizai Shinposha, 1991) (in Japanese).

some results are becoming evident. One considered possibly deleterious to women's interests is that some companies have began to require female employees to make a choice at the time they are hired of whether they prefer a career on the sogo shoku (general management) track or a job on the ippan shoku (clerical) track. In this way the company presumably can treat female workers the same way they do men, who are assumed to be sogo shoku employees. Alice Lam, a management development fellow at England's Manchester University Business School, has questioned the application of the two-track system, saying, "[I]n practice men are almost automatically assigned to [the career management track], whereas women are selected for it only exceptionally. During selection interviews, women often appeared to be challenged with tough questions about mobility and potential sacrifices of family life. Despite the formal offer of opportunities, in reality very few women managed to pass the selection procedures."[14]

Possibly as a result of the decisions forced on them by the EEO law, more women interviewed in 1984 said they planned to follow a continuous career path than did women in 1988, when increased numbers said they planned to quit work to have children.[15] Women's response to the opportunity to join the management track has not been enthusiastic; nor have all recruits stayed aboard, according to a freelance writer for the American Chamber of Commerce in Japan Journal. Doune Porter noted that many women who initially signed on to the sogo shoku track later have chosen to switch to the clerical track.[16]

Some companies have recognized that an early vote by women to "go management" poses tough questions about future commitments to the company -- especially the chance of a transfer at a time when a woman might be interested in starting a family; these employers have sketched a management-track possibility for women that does not require transfers.[17] How well plans like these will work remains to be seen. Responses to a 1989 MOL survey indicated that roughly 40 percent of the biggest corporations in Japan had adopted a multiple-track personnel system of some kind, while only about 22 percent of the next-largest firms (between 1,000 and 5,000 employees) had such a plan. Most companies said they did not expect to introduce such an option.

Government Not Necessarily a Model - Ostensibly the central government's hiring is gender-blind both because of the EEO law and because professional positions are obtained through examination. Yet only 199 women were among the applicants who successfully passed this year's test; they represented 9.9 percent of the total. Placements obtained by those with just a senior high school education numbered 191 women versus 619 men in 1989. The fact that the central government's work force is only 17.5 percent female simply may mean that few women choose to take the government exam or apply for a government job; the equality presumed in government jobs is likely to mean long hours at lower pay

[14]Alice Lam, "Equal Employment Opportunities for Japanese Women," Anglo Japanese Journal, V, No. 1, May-August 1991, p. 22.

[15]Ibid.

[16]Doune Porter, "The Glass Ceiling: Japanese Women and Upward Mobility," American Chamber of Commerce in Japan Journal, May 1991, p. 27.

[17]Ibid.

than entrants might earn in the private sector. It could be symptomatic of a broader problem, however, given the low ratio of women to men in jobs requiring less education.

Political women have had a higher profile than their bureaucratic counterparts, especially after 1986 when the Japan Socialist Party appointed Takako Doi as its chairperson. Ms. Doi, who resigned earlier this summer, was credited with boosting the number of women in the upper house of the Diet in a 1989 campaign that featured "madonna candidates" as a protest of what was called a corruption-prone, male-dominated political system (see JEI Report No. 32A, August 18, 1989).

Among several relatively recent political firsts have been the first woman appointed chief cabinet secretary, Mayumi Moriyama in 1989; the first Japanese woman to be named as a high official in an international organization, Sadako Ogata as the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees in 1990; and, at the local level, the first woman to become a vice governor. This past May Teruko Kanehira, former director of the Tokyo Metropolitan Government's Social Welfare Department, became Tokyo's vice governor, two months before the Okinawa prefectural assembly approved a female candidate for its vice governor. Women still lag behind men in local politics, though, accounting for roughly 2 percent of all prefectural assembly members and 4 percent of city assemblies in 1989.

The central government is susceptible to criticism not just for the relatively low percentage of women on its payroll but also for its failure to meet a self-imposed goal to boost women's participation on government-appointed advisory councils to at least 10 percent by fiscal 1991. Of the 200-plus councils advising cabinet ministers at the end of March 1991, women comprised 9 percent of the participants, holding 398 of the 4,434 seats, according to a survey reported in July by Kyodo News Service. The director of the government's women's affairs office was quoted as saying, "In order to attain real equality between men and women, women have to have power in decisionmaking." Officials in Japan have set a goal of only 15 percent participation by women on such committees for 1995, half that recommended by the United Nations at whose urging Japan originally set the participation goals. Although women are well-represented on panels directly related to women's issues, few are appointed to science or technology committees; interestingly, the only cabinet position now held by a woman is that of the Science and Technology Agency. Since the private sector suggests names for appointments, the women's affairs office has asked the government to urge more consideration of women as nominees.

Child Care Leave Law - A carefully worded, nongender-based Child Care Leave Law won Diet approval this year and will go into effect next April. Companies are urged to arrange a system whereby either parent can take time away from work until an infant is a year old. Between April 1992 and March 1995 the law will apply only to firms with 30 or more employees, meaning that for three years about 33 percent of the female work force employed in manufacturing will not be affected; nor will 44 percent of the women working in the wholesale and retail sector and 35 percent of those in the services sector. Neither will fathers working in such firms be eligible for leave. After April 1995, however, small firms are expected to comply. Even those to whom the law will apply initially have no guarantee that they will be paid if they are allowed leave. Moreover, they have no recourse for noncompliance since the law contains no

penalties. Keizai Doyukai (Japan Association of Corporate Executives) had opposed any sanctions being included in the law, which opposition parties had urged; under a compromise the possibility of drafting sanctions will be considered at a later date.

The legislation suggests that firms present to the Labor Ministry their plan -- including how wages and reentry into the company will be handled -- so that the government can offer advice. The Labor Standards Law currently sets out provisions under which pregnant employees can receive six weeks of leave before childbirth and up to eight weeks after delivery, with six of those post-delivery weeks required to be offered as leave. Pregnant women or new mothers taking advantage of these leave provisions cannot be fired in the meantime or for 30 days after the period of leave. Although the Equal Employment Opportunity Law obligated employers to set out how they would implement these provisions, only 16.6 percent had done so by February 1989.[18] (Even if a company does not grant partial or full pay during pregnancy or maternity leave, the Health Insurance Law provides for up to 60 percent of the affected employee's daily wage during the period.)

Several companies, particularly those with a large proportion of highly trained female employees, have instituted more generous leave policies; some guarantee that the jobs of employees on child care leave will be available for up to three years. As many as 19.2 percent of all companies with 30 or more employees have instituted some form of child care leave, according to the Japan Institute of Women's Employment. Moreover, the Labor Ministry has suggested compensating firms that implement such provisions; when the leave law was passed in May, the proposed compensation figure was Y200,000 ($1,500) per employee who took child care leave.

The difficulty women have had in the past reentering the work force after leaving for a period is said to be one of the reasons more of them are expected to take advantage of the new leave policies and return to work more quickly than they might have previously. Such a result would reinforce the government's twin goals of encouraging more women to work as well as encouraging women to have more babies (who, in turn, will support current generations in their old age).

Day-Care Centers - The government's recognition of women's interest in working and its concern about the low birth rate coincide in its decision to push the availability of day-care centers. Surveys indicate that about 90 percent of all children under the age of 2 stay at home with a caregiver, but by age 5 almost one-third are in day-care centers; 63.7 percent in 1987 attended kindergarten. Although a majority of both men and women prefer that someone be at home with a young child, a 1988 Ministry of Health and Welfare survey showed that more of the younger generation believed day-care centers should be improved to enable women to continue working. In the 20-29 age bracket 20.4 percent of the female and 18.2 percent of the male respondents favored day-care improvements that allow mothers to remain on the job. The idea that parental leave systems should be improved so that one parent can stay at home while a child is young but return to work later drew 36.4 percent backing from the men

[18] Japan's Working Women Today, op. cit., p. 27.

in that age group; slightly more (39.1 percent) supported the traditional concept that one parent should stay at home with a child. Better leave policies were a strong favorite of the female respondents in the 20-29 group; 51 percent picked that option compared to the 24.3 percent preferring that one parent stay at home. The traditional view gained support among older age groups for both men and women; favoring that response were 38.3 percent of the women and 46 percent of the men in the 50-59 age group.

Despite traditional views, more mothers are working. An estimated 68.6 percent of those who gave birth in 1988 continued to work compared with a 50.9 percent rate in 1965, according to government figures. Not all these mothers rely on day-care centers. The 1988 data showed that 67.2 percent of working mothers with a baby less than a year old left the infant with their parents or parents-in-law. The extent of three-generation households in Japan, 13.5 percent of the total in 1990, has declined gradually. The availability of a caregiver at home is one reason an estimated 67.4 percent of mothers in three-generation families work compared with 49.3 percent of mothers in nuclear families.

The aging of Japan's population also has put working women in three-generation households on notice that they may be called home to care for an older relative as easily as for a sick child. The government's response has been to try to boost not only the number of children's day-care centers but those for the elderly as well. MHW subsidized 1,080 elderly day-care facilities in its FY 1989 budget; another 129,600 facilities were available as "clubs."

In 1989 public day-care centers for children numbered 13,449; registered private facilities totaled 9,237. The vacancy rate was about 13 percent. Problems include a shortage of centers that accept infants (about 22 percent do) and a scarcity of facilities staying open until at least 7 p.m. (only about 9 percent do). As of April this year the Ministry of Health and Welfare set a 7 a.m. to 10 p.m. schedule for at least 200 public centers. MHW also has said subsidies would be available in late 1991 for child-care centers that have signed contracts with various companies that require late-night and weekend hours. One response by day-care firms in Japan has been to tie up with U.S. companies experienced in setting up in-house day-care services at corporate sites.

Attitudes and the Potential for Change

The perception of women workers in Japan is that they see employment as a choice rather than a matter of course. Reinforcing this idea, the media pay little attention to women who must support themselves and feature, instead, the so-called Office Ladies who live with their parents and are portrayed widely as approaching work somewhat frivolously since they expect to quit when they marry; until then they spend their income on designer clothes and travel. This latter group, determined strictly by age-based participation and ignoring the many women under the age of 35 who are serious about careers, represents at most about one-third of the women in Japan's labor force.

What of the women who intend to pursue a career? Reports show that jobs with an aura of glamor top the list. A recent survey by a private job placement firm of women graduates of four- or two-year colleges indicated that preferred employers were airlines and travel agencies. According to the survey, insurance

firms ranked high but financial institutions -- tainted by scandal -- had lost their appeal. Firms associated with electronics advanced in the eyes of female university graduates. The number of women who study to become medical doctors has risen steadily, but women still make up only about 11 percent of all medical doctors. Similarly, women who have been accepted into the Legal Training and Research Institute, which qualifies lawyers, have accounted for between 2 and 2.2 percent of all entrants over the last six years. Of women who enter the teaching profession the majority are elementary school teachers; less than 20 percent become university professors.

In general, women study far more liberal arts subjects than men and are less interested in the social sciences or engineering. As noted above, employers weigh an applicant's educational background as evidence of an interest in a career. Whether women will begin to study more business-oriented subjects could depend on their employment expectations.

Despite support from the government in the form of day-care centers and child care leave, societal attitudes remain strong among both men and women that mothers should stay at home with young children. Most companies appear less than committed to implementing leave laws and reentry provisions that would allow a parent to take a leave of absence to spend time at home in a child's early years. Several observers of the Japanese work scene have suggested that the key to improving women's status in the work world without shortchanging the needs of the family is to encourage shorter working hours for everyone. The burden put on working women, who are responsible for most household and child care duties, will not be lifted until men begin to share some of these duties, these analysts say. Former head of the Economic Planning Agency, Sumiko Takahara, recently outlined her recipe for major structural change:

> In order to reduce working hours and bring greater real affluence and comfort to Japanese society, we will need still more women in the work force. When this happens, men will be required to participate more in the household, using the free time they gain through the reduction in working hours.

Ms. Takahara added, "Shorter work hours for all could reduce complaints by foreign critics who feel the Japanese work too much.[19] Although the government has set a goal of reducing the average number of hours worked a year to 1,800 by 1992, few labor analysts expect the actual figure to drop that speedily from FY 1990's average of 2,044 hours. Recorded overtime in FY 1990 worked out to about 185 hours per regular employee, but that figure does not include the time "freely" contributed by employees who "clock out" of the building but continue to work. Expectations of overtime clash with both a company's willingness to promote working mothers and working mothers' enthusiasm for staying on the job. Overtime demands are an even greater concern if day-care centers close earlier than one of the parents can leave work.

Another problem for working mothers in Japan is the expectation by most employers that employees will take only part of their annual leave. In her book

[19]Sumiko Takahara, "Women Power in Japan's Economy," Journal of Japanese Trade & Industry, No. 2, 1991, p. 30.

on Japanese working women Ms. Saso noted that not all women were happy when the Labor Ministry revised annual leave laws in 1988 to encourage more use of vacation time through standardized leave schedules. Working mothers "who save most of their leave to be used at the times when they need to care for sick children or to attend school meetings" greeted the plan with dismay, she wrote.[20] Although American mothers may use their leave for much the same reasons, the constraints on taking leave generally are fewer.

The government's effort to shorten the work day is only one change that could affect the male-oriented work world in Japan. As already pointed out, the labor shortage could result in more women taking regular, full-time jobs. Similarly, more men might be attracted to part-time and temporary positions; demand for part-time employees also may lead to rising pay scales. Other changes might be on the horizon for the seniority system. The Labor Ministry reported in July, for example, that one of every 10 companies this year offered new recruits starting salaries higher than those given current employees. The seniority system long has played a major role in determining wages, although companies have found ways to give merit pay or to hire midcareer recruits at attractive salaries dissociated from seniority concerns. Changes in the seniority system could have an impact on female workers who gain skills early in their work history but take time out to have children. A less rigid system also might allow more leeway for women who seek management positions, not only because the tradition remains that women are the most likely to take time off for child care but because employers, themselves, might start giving more weight to merit than longevity in deciding promotion potential.

As more and more Japanese women enter the work force, their own attitudes toward working will play a key role in their chances of being viewed as an integral part of the labor force and not just a supplement. Recognizing the need for changes in societal attitudes, the women's liberation movement in Japan in the 1970s concentrated on changes in society as a whole and not necessarily on job equality.[21] Japanese women's groups still do not focus strictly on employment equality as much as on a broad array of issues concerning women, including health and safety. Nihon Fujin Dantai Rengokai (Federation of Japanese Women's Associations), an umbrella organization representing 19 individual women's groups with 700,000 members, works not only on equal rights but the abolition of nuclear weapons, for example. The Japan Association of Female Executives lends practical support to its members by recruiting a pool of college students as babysitters to enable members to attend seminars or to work late. The group's advice sessions include child-raising strategies.[22]

Concerns Overseas

The increase in Japanese-owned subsidiaries overseas has generated an interest in whether personnel patterns are following the spiritual lead of the

[20]Saso, op. cit., p. 111.

[21]See Yumiko Ehara, Body of Thought Known as Women's Liberation (Tokyo: Keisou Shobou, 1985) (in Japanese) or an English annotation included in Introductory Bibliography for Japanese Studies, VI, Part I: Social Sciences, 1981-1985 (Tokyo: Bonjinsha Co., Ltd.)

[22]Saso, op. cit., p. 119.

home office more than the letter of the law of the country in which the subsidiary is based. Japanese businesses operating overseas are required to meet wage, hiring and other nondiscriminatory personnel practices as defined by national and local laws. Concern that foreign-based firms are skirting such requirements in the United States is behind three hearings before the House Committee on Government Operations' subcommittee on employment and housing, chaired by Rep. Tom Lantos. At the first hearing in July (another was held in August and the third is planned for September) the chairman of the U.S. Equal Employment Opportunity Commission noted that the call to testify before the California Democrat's subcommittee was "the first time we have been asked [in the agency's 26-year history] to compare the 'track record' of foreign corporations to domestic corporations." Evan Kemp, Jr. also cautioned that comparisons could raise questions that "entangle civil rights with foreign policy considerations."[23]

After giving caveats about the use of comparisons, Mr. Kemp noted that EEOC's information found that, based on the 39 Japanese-owned firms reviewed along with other companies filing specific EEO forms: "Women gained one-third of all new jobs in Japanese-owned companies during the 1980-1985 period and 38 out of every 100 new jobs during the 1985-1989 period." This compared, Mr. Kemp said, with other foreign-owned companies' experience of hiring women for about three-fourths of all their new jobs between 1980 and 1985. He added that in 1989, "The representation of women was lowest in Japanese-owned companies, 38.5 percent compared to 49 percent in other foreign-owned companies and 46.2 percent in total companies. . . . Women were 15.9 percent of the officials and managers in Japanese companies compared to 32.3 percent in other foreign-owned companies and 28.6 percent in all companies."

Yet Japanese firms in the United States have made advances in hiring women, Mr. Kemp told the subcommittee. Female employment grew 18.4 percent a year at Japanese-owned companies over the 1985-89 period but only 3.3 percent at other foreign-owned firms and 4.1 percent for all firms used in the comparison. Similarly, he said, a higher percentage of women managers was appointed between 1985 and 1989 at Japanese-owned firms here (27.5 percent a year) than at the average firm (18.4 percent a year). The advances might stem from charges or the threat of charges against Japanese-affiliated companies; 115 EEO complaints were filed in 1990 against 35 Japanese-owned firms, a number Mr. Kemp termed small compared with the total of 59,426 complaints filed last year. Or Japanese-owned firms might have seen the writing on the wall from a 1987 Supreme Court decision that essentially declared that the American subsidiaries of foreign-owned firms had to meet U.S. laws.

In some cases women in the United States may have better prospects for employment by Japanese-owned companies than Japanese women would at home. Given U.S. enforcement of equal employment opportunities, women have more chances to challenge stereotypes by working on the assembly floor at automotive factories, for example. Toyota Motor Corp.'s August announcement that it would raise the number of women employed on its production lines in Japan from 90 to 500 over the next five years (out of overall employment of about 68,000) contrasts with its U.S. employment record. At Toyota's Georgetown, Kentucky plant

[23]Written statement of Evan Kemp, Jr. before House Committee on Government Operations, Subcommittee on Employment and Housing, July 23, 1991.

the 3,900-person work force is 25 percent female, while Toyota's joint operation with General Motors Corp. in Fremont, California employs nearly 500 women on its 2,700-person production staff. Similarly, Nissan Motor Co., Ltd., which has 560 females working on its assembly line in Japan (out of a total of 55,000 employees), also employs a higher percentage of women at its U.S. plant; of the 3,098 technicians in Smyrna, Tennessee, 671 are women.

Yet in terms of legislated child care leave and state-subsidized day-care centers, the average working mother (and father) appears to receive a degree of direct government support in Japan that is not as overt in the United States. Laws alone, however, are not sufficient for assuring equality in employment in any country. Although a change in corporate and societal attitudes may accompany increased education and internationalization, companies in Japan probably will continue to push aside the concerns of working parents in favor of the benefits to the bottom line of a solid core labor force that works long hours. While women are making some inroads into that core group, many still are forced to make a choice between work and family. Even those who do not face this choice find that protective laws and attitudes prevent them from equal employment opportunities. In short, the prospect for real advances remain slim until both men and women begin to recognize that women are more than a supplemental source of labor in Japan.

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Loren Edelson provided research assistance.

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The views expressed in this report are those of the author and do not necessarily represent those of the Japan Economic Institute.

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NOTE

ONLY THE FOLLOWING PAGES OF THIS

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1, Statistical Supplement